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SUBJECT: UN PEACEBUILDING COMMISSION VISIT TO BURUNDI

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¶B. BUJUMBURA 266

Classified By: Ambassador Patricia Moller for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D.)

¶1. (C) Summary: The UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) has identified four priority areas in which to work in Burundi, according to a delegation which visited Bujumbura April 11-14. The PBC is now preparing an integrated peacebuilding strategy which will focus on good governance, rule of law, security sector reform, and community recovery. They urged Burundi to continue to work to implement a cease-fire agreement with the rebel PALIPEHUTU-FNL noting that only Burundi itself could create a stable political climate. The delegation also pledged to help Burundi mobilize additional resources for development, while noting the PBC would not serve as another donor mechanism. Privately, however, the head of the PBC delegation commented that the Burundian government may be expecting too much of the Peacebuilding Commission. End Summary.

¶2. (U) In a visit to Burundi April 11-14, a UN Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) delegation emphasized that it would focus on four priority areas: good governance, rule of law, security sector reform, and community recovery. The PBC plans to work with the Government of Burundi (GOB) to develop an integrated peacebuilding strategy, which it expects to complete by midsummer. The Chair of the delegation, Ambassador Johan Levald, Norway's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, indicated that the peacebuilding process must be a broad based effort, rather than exclusively a donor process. The PBC recognized the importance of upcoming Donor Round Table, scheduled for May 24-25, noting that the PBC hoped to provide added value to the discussions there.

¶3. (U) The PBC delegation's Burundi program included meetings with senior government officials, including President Pierre Nkurunziza, First Vice President Martin Nduwimana, Minister Of External Relations Antoinette Batumubwira, Minister of Justice Clotilde Niragira, and senior leaders of the Senate and National Assembly. The group also met with members of political parties, civil society, the private sector, and religious leaders, as well as with the diplomatic corps. UN organizers invited locally-based diplomats from PBC member nations to participate in some of the events, which also included a day-long field trip to Gitega, two hours east of Bujumbura.

Support for Economic Development

¶4. (SBU) PBC delegation members emphasized that their message to the GOB was one of support and encouragement. The delegation recognized that the GOB sought to use the PBC

visit as preparation for the Donor Round Table, particularly as a means to attract additional support. Ambassador Levald privately confided that Burundi seemed to expect too much of the Peacebuilding Commission, seeing it perhaps as a means to obtain extensive financing. Nonetheless, Ambassador Levald and his delegation stressed both publicly and privately that the PBC did not intend to duplicate other ongoing projects; rather, it would work with the GOB to define areas of responsibility. In its discussions with GOB officials, the delegation reiterated the UN's commitment to help Burundi to consolidate peace and to assist in resource mobilization to combat poverty and promote community recovery. The delegation stressed the importance of an open political dialogue, respect for human rights, and good governance. They warned that the delays in implementing the cease fire agreement with the PALIPEHUTU-FNL could jeopardize the long-term stability of the country. While the PBC itself could provide support for capacity building, only Burundi could provide the necessary political stability to encourage economic development.

¶15. (U) Burundian officials stressed that although Burundi has made tremendous progress, it continues to face political challenges. The country's biggest challenge, according to First Vice President Nduwimana, is the need to bridge political, social and economic gaps within the society. Burundi has already adopted a Poverty Reduction Strategy, noted Foreign Minister Batumubwira; now, it is seeking full financing for the plan. Burundi would rely on support and advocacy both from its donor partners and from the PBC itself. In order to garner support for the upcoming Round Table, Burundi planned to dispatch emissaries abroad to meet with current and potential donor nations; she urged the PBC to approach these countries simultaneously, on Burundi's behalf, in order to bolster donor confidence.

The Problem of the FNL

¶16. (U) Many interlocutors stressed the need to establish a secure peace by resolving outstanding issues with the FNL. Foreign Minister Batumubwira noted the need for patience and perseverance in order to reach a lasting agreement. Opposition political leaders asserted that in order to consolidate peace, it would be essential to negotiate with FNL head Agathon Rwasa and other armed groups which remain outside the government. They urged the PBC to support such talks, asking further that the PBC encourage the GOB to facilitate a dialogue between all political parties. Political reps lamented that the opposition currently does not play a constructive role in government, since both sides are still learning their respective roles in a democratic society.

¶17. (U) The delegation also expressed concerns about the justice sector and the issue of impunity. Asked which crimes would be subject to justice and not subject to amnesty, Minister of Justice Niragira replied that international crimes, including genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity could never be subject to amnesty or impunity. Minister Nirargira added that the GOB is in the process of analyzing all existing laws and would propose necessary amendments in order to put into place a justice system which would reflect the country's current circumstances.

¶18. (U) Both political and religious leaders urged the PBC to work with Burundi to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). Clerics, in particular, believed they could play a critical role in creating an atmosphere of trust and forgiveness in which a TRC could work. The three prelates - of the Roman Catholic, Anglican, and Islamic faiths - agreed that a successful TRC must state facts truthfully and faithfully. At the same time, the judiciary must resolve the question of impunity. Finally, they said, reconciliation must lead to community reintegration without reference to compensation.

Comment

¶9. (C) Although the delegation publicly expressed satisfaction with the results of their visit, some members acknowledged privately that many of the meetings were of limited utility. Although the schedule included sessions with representatives of each of the major sectors in Burundian public life, the visit itself appeared poorly organized. In more than one instance, the sheer numbers of attendees, combined with the limited amount of time allotted for each session, hampered an active exchange of ideas. Although the delegation explained clearly its goals for its mission, it is less likely that their meetings provided them as comprehensive a contextual background as they may have hoped to receive.

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